

Writing Objectives

Program Objectives

Program objectives are 'outcomes' of your activities, not be confused with the activities themselves. The difference between methods and objectives, is the difference between means and ends.

To often, grant seeker confuse *means* and *ends*. Distinguishing between them is of critical importance in planning programs and writing proposals. The means are your methods. The ends are your objectives. Objectives are *problem-related outcomes of your program*.

If you begin your statements with words like these, you are sure to be talking about *methods*, and not objectives:

To provide. . .

To establish. . .

To create. . .

If you use words like these, your are more likely talking about *objectives*:

To increase. . .

To decrease. . .

To reduce. . .

Program objectives that are measurable become the criteria by which you judge the effectiveness of your program. To be really useful, program objectives should:

1. Tell *who*
2. Is going to be doing *what*
3. by *when*
4. How much
5. How we will measure it

Here is an example of an objective that is well defined:

At the conclusion of the five-day workshop, at least 20 to 25 participants will demonstrate a pre/post text gain of at least 25 percent on the Evaluator's Competency Test, covering the areas of (1) introductory statistical terminology, (2) measurable objectives, and (3) education program evaluation concepts.

That objective (for an educational program? tell us that the applicant is committed to communication certain information to a group of learners, and that the learns will have acquired new information over the course of the five-day workshop. Note that there is no mention of how this information will be used. This would require a separate objective, which might be the following:

By the end of the first program year, at least 15 of the 25 participants, each representing a different local education agency will increase their district's commitment to evaluation in the following ways: in at least 15 of these districts the average number of specially-funded programs that are evaluated will be increased by 25 percent, from an average of four programs in 10 to an average of five programs in 10. In addition, the average financial support for evaluation will be increased from \$500 per program to \$1,500 per program over the same period.

Contrast the above the following education objectives drawn from proposals:

"To prepare children to develop a positive self-concept."

"To teach each individual the importance of self-expression."

"To prepare children to enter any type of classroom situation."

"To expose children to their own culture."

"To teach the meaning of respect for people, places and things."

"To teach children the ability to make their own decisions."

Do these meet the criteria for objectives? No, they do not. These statements are vague descriptions of methodology, mixed with *'goals'* statements. Goals are long-range benefits that you may be seeking; there you have some freedom to use imprecise and flowery terms. Such terms have no place in your objectives, however.

How would you ever determine whether you had accomplished them?

Since objectives and problem statement are so closely related, we will examine both in the following examples.

Example:

Problem Statement / Needs Assessment:

Twenty-five percent (40,825) of the area's 160,000 population is estimated to be below the poverty level. Families in the area suffer from lack of adequate nutritional meals, due to limited income from which to purchase food.

There are many complex and interrelated reasons for nutritional problems. Inadequate income is a major cause of poor nutritional status. Other factors include lack of knowledge; complications of disease; sedentary life styles; mental and emotional factors; social isolation; lack of food preparation and storage facilities; consumer confusion and misinformation; overabundance of foods of low nutritional value and high cost. food.

Adequate food and sound nutrition are essential to good health. Not only are they crucial for human survival and key factors in the prevention and recovery from illness, but they are prerequisites for improving the quality of life of the low-income citizen.

Objectives:

The objective of this program is to improve the opportunities of low-income persons to gain access to participation in federal and non-federal food and nutrition program by employing a nutritionist and staff who will conduct training sessions for outreach staff and monitor federal food and nutrition programs in the area.

the objective of 'improving the opportunities' is not measurable. It also hedges about whether more individuals will actually participate in these food programs as a result of the planned program. All that follows the "by. . ." is method. Because the problem statement specifically talks of nutritional problems (but fails to provide any evidence of these problems), we would hope to find at least one objective that projected an improved diet for the program's beneficiaries. the applicant has not examined the problem in any detail. Rather, the applicant has a program in mind, and has set down the problem statement the proposed program activities. You can be sure that "lack of knowledge" (who lacks knowledge about what?) will lead to an educational component; "lack of food and facilities" is setting us up for the providing of such facilities (whatever they are and whatever their purpose). The problem statement is inadequately defined, assuring our inability to state specific objectives and raising serious questions regarding the potential benefit that might come from this program.

Let's take a look at another proposal that works better, from need to objective:

Example:

Problem Statement / Needs Assessment:

Washington and Hancock Counties, Maine, lie in the most northeastern corner of the United States. The area has a population of slightly over 70,000, of which more than 85 percent live in rural areas. In almost all categories of employment, health services, and income, the area is disadvantaged compared to state and federal figures. The Maine Department of Manpower has cited unemployment ranging up to 29 percent over the past several years, during which time the national average never exceeded 8 percent.

Incomes in the area are extremely low. One-third of all families have incomes under \$5,000 annually. 74 percent have incomes under \$10,000. Within the state of Maine, which has the lowest per capita income in the U.S., Washington County has the greatest percentage of families below the poverty level. Of the employed labor force of 32,000, more than 30 percent work in seasonal jobs (e.g., cutting pulp, lobstering or clamming) and are paid the minimum wage.

At this same time, there are several underutilized natural resources in the area, including shellfish, low-grade hardwood and peat moss. Department of Interior surveys in 1997 revealed that there were more than 200 million tons of peat moss in the area. The market price of Maine peat moss is currently \$50 per ton. Currently, on 5,000 tons of peat are mined each year in Maine, while the U.S. annually imports as much as one million tons of similar quality at comparable prices (see U.S. Bureau of Mines, 1996 Annual Report).

Peat moss production is an industry involving a number of activities, including mining or harvesting, drying, grading, packaging and shipping. End products include peat posts and filters for septic systems and industrial use. A 1997 U.S. Economic Development Administration Report (see attached) established the strong market potential of peat and peat products. But traditional economic development strategies, such as community industrial parks and plant relocation, have not been successful in stimulating industry to locate in the area. Maine's location in the extreme northeastern section of the U.S., and the anticipated high transportation costs of products and raw materials, are cited as one significant reason (1997 State of Maine Labor Department report). Peat, however, costs less to transport from Maine to major U.S. cities than it does to transport from the maritime provinces of Canada, the source of most imported peat.

Critical to this issue is the unrealized economic value of raw peat moss. At the bog, the value of Maine peat is 2.5 cents per pound. A supermarket in Washington, D.C., sells peat as a soil conditioner in three-pound bags for \$1.79, or 59 cents per pound. The total cost of harvesting, drying, grading,

packaging and shipping raw peat allows not only a substantial profit for the entrepreneur, but promises the employment on a more regular basis of persons with a wide range of skills. The development of the peat moss industry in this area of Mine is the subject of this proposal.

Objectives:

This proposed program has two primary objectives. First, to increase employment in the peat moss industry in Hancock and Washington Counties from the current (1997) 150 workers to 500 workers by October 2000. This increase will come from local workers who are presently unemployed or seasonally unemployed with annual incomes of under \$5,000.

Second, to increase the annual peat production in these counties from the current 5,000 tons to 500,000 tons by October 2000, this generating \$25,000,000 in new revenue for this area.

This is an interesting, documented and logical movement from problem statement to measurable objectives.

Process Objectives

Some people call the objectives we have been considering 'behavioral objectives'; others call them 'performance objectives', 'program objectives' or 'outcome objectives'. Fine lines of distinction may be drawn between the four, but all describe the results of a project. They are quite different from 'process objectives', which refer to the completion of tasks you were to accomplish over the course of the program or grant. For example: 'to complete the recruitment of 100 eligible participants by the end of the first 60 days of the grant period.' That is a process objective. It is useful. But do not confuse this with an outcome objective. There is no guarantee that the recruitment of your participants will relate to any benefits they may obtain from your services. *Outcome objectives relate to benefits.* 'To conduct 24 one-day training sessions, each with 10 trainees, covering the area of blah, blah and blah, over the first six months' is a process objective. 'To counsel 300 young people by the end of the 12-month program' is a process objective.

How much change?

A proposal from a drug rehabilitation center claimed that 89 percent of its clients were cured, and that a grant could produce similar results in a comparable population. Reviewers were skeptical of this claim; they viewed it as evidence of the naivete of the applicant. An examination revealed that the claim was based on a small number of program clients, for all

clients who had not completed a full year at the center were dropped from the statistics, and classified as 'untreated.'

A realistic estimate of benefit should be based on the experience of your agency and your knowledge of the success of similar programs. If a specific percentage gain can only be guessed at, you may commit to a 'statistically significant' change – that is, one that statistically could not have occurred as a result of chance. Look to a person inside or outside your agency with some statistical background to assist you in determining statistical significance.

Checklist for Objectives

- ☐ Describes problem - related outcomes of your program
- ☐ Does not describe your methods
- ☐ Defines the population served
- ☐ States the time when the objectives will be met
- ☐ Describes the objectives in numerical terms, if at all possible